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Theory of Greek Tragedy

BY

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EDITED, WITH NOTES,

BY

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SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

WILLIAM DOXEY.

1893

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I have reprinted this essay primarily for the use of students in my own classes, but with the hope that it may appeal to a wider circle of general readers. It is, to be sure, included in the collected editions of De Quincey's works, but experience has shown the advisability of a separate issue of this particular paper. Prof. Masson thus speaks of it: "Whatever else De Quincey exempted from his general depreciation of the Greek literature below the customary academic estimate of its worth, he exempted most emphatically * * * the Greek Tragic Drama. With him, as with every man before him who knew what real literature is, the remains of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were, as they will be to the end of time with all who have the same qualification, among the very highest and noblest things in the whole literature of the world. * * * In * * *Theory of Greek Tragedy* we have not, indeed, De Quincey's views of those three great masters of the Greek Tragic Drama individually and in comparison with each other, but only an exposition of his notion of the ruling idea or characteristic of the Greek Tragic Drama generally, as distinguished from that which governs the modern, or English, or Shakespearian Tragedy. It is, however, a deep and subtle little essay, conveying a thought so peculiar that its full reach and significance will not appear till it has been further meditated. * * It propounds a notion which, though at first it may appear a mere subtlety of De Quincey's peculiar intellect, gradually dawns out with startling

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certainty as the exact truth needed for the case." To such high testimony to the value of the essay it would be impertinent for me to try to add anything.

Possessing a remarkably subtle and analytical mind and a wonderful power of acquiring languages, De Quincey was just the man to grapple with the problems of Greek literature. He himself has left it on record that at thirteen he could write Greek with ease, and at fifteen could converse in it fluently. In fact, Dr. Morgan of the Bath Grammar School told a visitor that "That boy could harangue an Athenian mob better than you or I could address an English one." When, shortly afterwards, De Quincey ran away from school to escape the necessity of associating with boys that he felt were intellectually his inferiors, he carried a small volume of Euripides in his pocket; and throughout life he never lost his admiration for the masterpieces of Greek Tragedy. The following essay was published when he was fifty-five; and when, at the age of seventy-three, he revised it for the collected edition of his works, he found his opinions unchanged on all essential points. It represents, therefore, the mature judgment of "a scholar, and a ripe and good one."

But, with all his learning, De Quincey was not so far in advance of his age that modern scholarship has not surpassed him. While the main principles of the essay are as true now as they were fifty years ago, recent investigations and excavations have made some of the details doubtful or untenable. The great principle of evolution, in particular, has been adapted from the natural sciences and applied to the study of literature with fruitful results. Forms and types are no longer considered as sporadic and independent. Even Greek Tragedy is seen to have undergone a very decided development in the few years that intervened between Phrynichus and Agathon. Such a statement as "it could not alter or swerve *per saltum;* so that an influence once there, was always there," certainly requires qualification. The modern scholar traces a thread of connection, slight it may be, but none the less real, from *The Persians* to the latest dramatic spectacle; from *The Knights* to the populum

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farce-comedy of the day. In notes, therefore, I have called attention to the points where the student would do well to supplement his reading of this essay by reference to more recent works; and have added illustrations and exemplifications of De Quincey's statements. The essay is reprinted without alteration from the pages of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, in which it appeared in February, 1840. In foot-notes, however, I have indicated the changes that De Quincey made when revising the paper in 1858. These are neither numerous nor important, and I have had much hesitancy about introducing what may seem mere pedantry. But this reprint is intended mainly for students, and I cannot consider without value any exemplification of the truth that those who have made their mark as prose-writers have been most careful about minutiæ that to the beginner seem insignificant.

W. D. A.

University of California,
Jan. 26, 1893.

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Theory of Greek Tragedy.

The Greek tragedy is a great problem.[a] We cannot say that the Greek drama[b] is such in any more comprehensive sense; for the comedy of Greece depends essentially upon the same principles as our own. Comedy, as the reflex of the current of social life,[c] will shift in correspondence to the shifting movements of civilisation. Inevitably as human intercourse in cities grows more refined, comedy will grow more subtle; it will build itself on distinctions of character less grossly defined, and on features of manners more delicate and impalpable.[1] But the *fundus*, the ultimate resource, the well-head of the comic, must for ever be sought in the same[d] field — viz. the ludicrous of incident, or the ludicrous of situation, or the ludicrous which arises in a mixed way between the character and the situation.[2] The age of Aristophanes, for example, answered in some respects to our own earliest dramatic era, viz. from 1588 to 1635, an age not (as Dr Johnson assumes it to have been, in his elaborate preface to Shakspeare) rude or gross; on the contrary, far more intense with intellectual instincts and agencies than his own, which was an age of collapse.[3] But in the England of Shakspeare, as in the Athens of Aristophanes, the surface of society in cities still rocked, or at least undulated, with the ground-swell surviving from periods of intestine tumult and insecurity. The times were still martial and restless;

a a dark problem.
b drama, as a whole, is such
c reflex of social life
d sought in one and the same

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men still wore swords in pacific assemblies; the intellect of the age was a fermenting intellect; it was a revolutionary intellect. And comedy itself, coloured by the moving pageantries of life, was more sinewy, more audacious in its movements; spoke with something more of an impassioned tone; and was hung with draperies more rich, more voluminous, more picturesque. On the other hand, the age of the Athenian Menander, or the English Congreve, though still an unsettled age, was far less insecure in its condition of police, and far less showy in its exterior aspect.[4] In England, it is true that a picturesque costume still prevailed; the whole people were still draped* professionally; each man's dress proclaimed his calling; and so far it might be said, "*natio comœdia est.*"[a 5] But the characteristic and dividing spirit had fled, whilst the forms survived; and those middle men had universally arisen, *whose equivocal relations to different employments broke down the strength of contrast between them.*[b] Comedy, therefore, was thrown more exclusively upon the interior man; upon the *nuances* of his nature, or upon the finer spirit of his manners. It was now the acknowledged duty of comedy to fathom the coynesses of human nature, and to arrest the fleeting phenomena of human demeanour.

But tragedy stood upon another footing. Whilst the comic muse in every age acknowledges a relationship which is more than sisterly—in fact, little short of absolute identity—the tragic muse of Greece and England stand so far aloof as hardly to recognise each other under any common designation. Few people

*"The whole people were still draped professionally." For example, physicians[c] never appeared without the insignia of their calling; clergymen would have incurred the worst suspicions had they gone into the streets without a gown and bands. Ladies, again, universally wore masks, as the sole substitute known to our ancestors for the modern parasol; a fact, perhaps, now first noticed.[d]

a "natio comœda est."
b Not in italics in the second edition.
c For example, even in Queen Anne's reign, or so late as that of George I., physicians
d perhaps, not generally known.

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have ever studied the Grecian drama—and hence may be explained the possibility that so little should have been said by critics upon its characteristic differences, and nothing at all upon the philosophic ground of these differences. Hence may be explained the fact, that, whilst Greek tragedy has always been a problem in criticism, it is still a problem of which no man has attempted the solution.[6] This problem it is our intention briefly to investigate.

I. There are cases, occasionally occurring in the English drama and the Spanish, where a play is exhibited within a play. To go no further, every person remembers the remarkable instance of this in Hamlet. Sometimes the same thing takes place in painting. We see a chamber, suppose, exhibited by the artist, on the walls of which (as a customary piece of furniture) hangs a picture. And as this picture again might represent a room furnished with pictures, in the mere logical possibility of the case we might imagine this descent into a life below a life going on *ad infinitum*. Practically, however, the process is soon stopped. A retrocession of this nature is difficult to manage. The original picture is a mimic—an unreal life. But this unreal life is itself a real life with respect to the secondary picture; which again must be supposed realized with relation to the tertiary picture, if such a thing were attempted. Consequently, at every step of the *introvolution* (to neologize[a] a little in a case justifying a neologism.) something must be done to differentiate the gradations, and to express the subordinations of life; because each term in the descending series, being first of all a mode of non-reality to the spectator, is next to assume the functions of a real life in its relations to the next lower or interior term of the series.

What the painter does in order to produce this peculiar modification of appearances, so that an object shall affect us first of all as an idealized or unreal thing, and next as itself a sort of relation to some secondary object still more intensely unreal, we shall not attempt to describe; for in some technical points we should,

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a neologise

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perhaps, fail to satisfy the reader: and without technical explanations we could not satisfy the question. But, as to the poet—all the depths of philosophy, at least of any known and recognised philosophy, would less avail to explain speculatively the principles which, in such a case, should guide him than Shakspeare has explained by his practice. The problem before him was one of his own suggesting: the difficulty was of his own making. It was—so to differentiate a drama that it might stand within a drama, precisely as a painter places a picture within a picture; and therefore that the secondary or inner drama should be non-realized upon a scale that would throw, by comparison, a reflex colouring of reality upon the principal drama. This was the problem: this was the thing to be accomplished: and the secret, the law, of the process by which he accomplishes this is—to swell, tumefy, stiffen, not the diction only but the tenor of the thought; in fact, to stilt it, and to give it a prominence and an ambition beyond the scale which he adopted for his ordinary life. It is, of course, therefore in rhyme—an artifice which Shakspeare employs with great effect on other similar occasions, (that is, occasions when he wished to solemnize or in any way differentiate the life;) it is condensed and massed as respects the flowing of the thoughts; it is rough and horrent with figures in strong relief, like the embossed gold of an ancient vase: and the movement of the scene is contracted into short gyrations—so unlike the free sweep and expansion of his general developments.

Now, the Grecian tragedy stands in the very same circumstances, and rises from the same original basis. If, therefore, the reader can obtain a glimpse of the life within a life, which the painter sometimes exhibits to the eye, and which the Hamlet of Shakspeare exhibits to the mind—then he may apprehend the original phasis under which we contemplate the Greek tragedy.

II. But, to press further into the centre of things, perhaps the very first element in the situation of the Grecian tragedy, which operated by degrees to evoke all the rest, was the original elevation of the scale by which all was to be measured, in consequence of two

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accidents—1st, the sanctity of the ceremonies in which tragedy arose; 2d, the vast size of the ancient theatres.

The first point we need not dwell on: every body is aware that tragedy in Greece grew by gradual expansions out of an idolatrous rite—out of sacrificial pomp:[7] though we do not find anybody who has noticed the consequent overruling effect which this had upon the quality of that tragedy: how, in fact, from this early cradle of tragedy, arose a sanctity which compelled all things to modulate into the same religious key. But next, the theatres—why were they so vast in ancient cities, in Athens, in Syracuse, in Capua, in Rome? Purely from democratic influences. Every citizen was entitled to a place at the public scenical representations. In Athens, for example, the state paid for him.[8] He was present, by possibility and by legal fiction, at every performance; therefore, room must be prepared for him. And, allowing for the privileged foreigners, (the domiciled aliens called *metoikoi*,) we are not surprised to hear that the Athenian theatre was adapted to an audience of thirty thousand persons.[9] It is not enough to say *naturally*—inevitably[a] out of this prodigious compass, exactly ten times over the compass of the *large* Drury-Lane burned down a generation ago,[10] arose certain immediate results that moulded the Greek tragedy in all its functions, purposes, and phenomena. The person must be aggrandized, the countenance must be idealized. For upon any stage[11] corresponding in its scale to the colossal dimensions of such a house, the unassisted human figure would have been lost; the unexaggerated human features would have been seen as in a remote perspective, and besides, have had their expression lost; the unreverberated human voice would have been undistinguishable from the surrounding murmurs of the audience. Hence the cothurnus to raise the actor; hence the voluminous robes to hide the disproportion thus resulting to the figure; hence the mask larger than life, painted to represent the noble Grecian contour of countenance;

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a *naturally*—we have a right to say that *inevitably*—out of

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hence the mechanism by which it was made to swell the intonations of the voice like the brazen tubes of an organ.[12]

Here then, you have a tragedy, by its very origin, in mere virtue of the accidents out of which it arose, standing upon the inspiration of religious feeling; pointing, like the spires of our English parish churches, up to heaven by mere necessity of its earliest purpose, from which it could not alter or swerve *per saltum;* so that an influence once there, was always there.[13] Even from that cause, therefore, you have a tragedy ultra-human and Titanic. But next, from political causes falling in with that early religious cause, you have a tragedy forced into a more absolute and unalterable departure from a human standard. That figure so noble, that voice so profound, and, by the very construction of the theatres as well as of the masks, receiving such solemn reverberations, proclaim a being elevated above the ordinary human scale. And then comes the countenance always adjusted to the same unvarying tone of sentiment, viz. the presiding sentiment of the situation, which of itself would go far to recover the key-note of Greek tragedy. These things being given, we begin to perceive a life removed by a great gulf from the ordinary human life even of kings and heroes: we descry a life within a life.

III Here, therefore, is the first great landing-place, the first station, from which we can contemplate the Greek tragedy with advantage. It is, by comparison with the life of Shakspeare, what the inner life of the mimetic play in Hamlet is to the outer life of the Hamlet itself. It is a life below a life. That is—it is a life treated upon a scale so sensibly different from the proper life of the spectator, as to impress him profoundly with the feeling of its idealization. Shakspeare's tragic life is our own life exalted and selected: the Greek tragic life presupposed another life, the spectator's, thrown into relief before it. The tragedy was projected upon the eye from a vast profundity in the rear: and between this life and the spectator, however near its phantasmagoria might advance to him, was still an immeasurable gulf of shadows.

Hence, coming nearer still to the determinate na-

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ture and circumscription of the Greek tragedy, it was *not* in any sense a development—1. Of human character; or, 2. Of human passion. Either of these objects, attributed to tragedy, at once inoculates it with a life essentially on the common human standard. But that neither was so much as dreamed of, in the Grecian tragedy,[a] is evident from the mere mechanism and ordinary conduct of those dramas which survive; those especially which seem entitled to be viewed as fair models of the common standard. About a thousand lines,[b] of which one-fifth must be deducted for the business of the chorus, may be taken as the average extent of a Greek tragic drama.[14] Five acts, of one hundred and sixty lines each, allow no sweep at all for the systole and diastole, the contraction and expansion, the knot and the *dénouement*, of a tragic interest, according to our modern meaning. The ebb and flow, the inspiration and expiration, cannot find room to play in such a narrow scene. Were the interest made to turn at all upon the evolution of character, or of passion modified by character, and both growing upon the reader through various aspects of dialogue, of soliloquy, and of multiplied action—it would seem a storm in a wash-hand basin. A passion which advanced and precipitated itself through such rapid harlequin changes, would at best impress us with the feeling proper to a hasty melodrame, or perhaps serious pantomime. It would read like the imperfect outline of a play; or, still worse, would seem framed to move through such changes as might raise an excuse for the dancing and the lyric music. But the very external phenomena, the apparatus and scenic decorations of the Greek tragedy, all point to other functions. Shakspeare—that is, English tragedy—postulates the intense life of flesh and blood, of animal sensibility of man and woman—breathing, waking, stirring, palpitating with the pulses of hope and fear. In Greek tragedy, the very masks show the utter impossibility of these tempests or conflicts. Struggle there is none, internal or external: not like Hamlet's with his own

a dreamed of in the Grecian tragedy, is evident
b About 1000 to 1500 lines

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constitutional inertia, and his gloomy irresolution of conscience; not like Macbeth's with his better feeling as a man, with his generosity as a host.[a] Medea, the most tragic figure in the Greek scene, passes through no flux and reflux of passion, through no convulsions of jealousy on the one hand, or maternal love on the other. She is tossed to and fro by no hurricanes of wrath, wrenched by no pangs of anticipation. All that[b] is supposed to have passed out of the spectator's presence. The dire conflict no more exhibits itself scenically and "*coram populo*,"[15] than the murder of her two innocent children. Were it possible that it should, how could the *mask* be justified? The apparatus of the stage would lose all decorum; and Grecian taste, or sense of the appropriate, which much outran the strength of Grecian creative power, would have been exposed to perpetual shocks.

IV. The truth is now becoming palpable: certain great *situations*—not passion in states of growth, of movement, of self-conflict—but fixed, unmoving *situations* were selected; these held on through the entire course of one or more acts. A lyric movement of the chorus, which closed the act, and gave notice that it was closed, sometimes changed this situation; but throughout the act it continued unchanged, like a statuesque attitude. The story of the tragedy was pretty nearly involved and told by implication in the *tableaux vivans* which presided through the several acts. The very slight dialogue which goes on, seems meant rather as an additional exposition of the interest—a commentary on the attitude originally assumed—than as any exhibition of passions growing and kindling under the eye of the spectator. The mask, with its monotonous expression, is not out of harmony with the scene; for the passion is essentially fixed throughout, not mantling and undulating with the breath of change, but frozen into marble life.

And all this is both explicable in itself, and peremptorily determined, by the sort of idealized life—life in a state of remotion, unrealized, and translated into a

a his hospitality as a host.
b all this

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neutral world of high cloudy antiquity—which the tragedy of Athens demanded for its atmosphere.

Had the Greeks, in fact, framed to themselves the idea of a tumultuous passion—passion expressing itself by the agitations of fluctuating will, as any fit, or even possible, subject for scenic treatment; in that case they must have resorted to real life, the more real the better. Or, again, had real life offered to their conceptions a just field for scenic exhibition; in that case they must have been thrown upon conflicts of tempestuous passion: the more tempestuous the better. But being, by the early religious character of tragedy, and by the colossal proportions of their theatres, imperiously driven to a life more awful and still—upon life as it existed in elder days, amongst men so far removed that they had become invested with a patriarchal or even an antediluvian mistiness of antiquity, and often into the rank of demi-gods—they felt it possible to present this mode of being in states of *suffering*, for suffering is enduring and indefinite; but never in states of *conflict*, for conflict is, by its nature, fugitive and evanescent. The tragedy of Greece is always held up as a thing long past—the tragedy of England as a thing now passing. We are invited by Sophocles or Euripides, as by some great necromancer, to see long-buried forms standing in solemn groups upon the stage—phantoms from Thebes or from Cyclopian cities. But Shakspeare is a Cornelius Agrippa, who shows us in his magic glass creatures yet breathing and actually mixing in the great game of life upon some distant field, inaccessible to us without a magician's aid.[16]

The Greek drama, therefore, by its very necessities, proposing to itself only a few grand attitudes or situations, and brief dialogues, as the means of illuminating those situations, with scarcely anything of action *actually occurring on the stage*[a] — from these purposes derives its other peculiarities: in the elementary necessities lay the *fundus* of the rest.

V. The notion, for example, that murder or violent death was banished from the Greek stage, on the Pa-

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a action, "actually occurring on the stage"

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risian conceit of the shock which such bloody incidents would give to the taste, is perfectly erroneous.[17] Not because it was sanguinary, but because it was action, had the Greeks an objection to such violences. No action of *any kind* proceeds legitimately on that stage. The persons of the drama are always in a reposing state, *so long as they are before the audience*.[a] [18] And the very meaning of an *act* is, that in the intervals, the suspensions of the acts,[b] any possible time may elapse, and any possible action may go on.[19]

VI. Hence, also, a most erroneous theory has arisen about Fate as brooding over the Greek tragic scene. This was a favourite notion of the two Schlegels.[20] But it is evident that many Greek tragedies, both amongst those which survive, and amongst those the titles and subjects of which are recorded, did not, and could not present any opening at all for this dark agency.[21] Consequently it was not essential. And, even where it did intervene, the Schlegels seem to have misunderstood its purpose. A prophetic colouring, a colouring of ancient destiny, connected with a character or an event, has the effect of exalting and ennobling. But whatever tends towards this result, inevitably translates the persons and their situation from that condition of ordinary breathing life which it was the constant effort of the Greek tragedy to escape; and therefore it was, that the Greek poet preferred the gloomy idea of Fate: not because it was essential, but because it was elevating. It is for this reason, and apparently for this reason only, that Cassandra is connected by Æschylus with Agamemnon. The Sphynx,[c] indeed, was connected with the horrid tale of Œdipus in *every* version of the tale: but Cassandra was brought upon the stage out of no *certain* historic tradition, or proper relation to Agamemnon, but to confer the solemn and mysterious hoar of a dark prophetic woe[d] upon the dreadful catastrophe. Fate was therefore used, not for its own direct moral value as a force upon the will, but for its

a "so long as they are before the audience"
b suspension of the acts
c Sphinx
d wo

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derivative power of ennobling and darkening.

VII. Hence, too, that habit amongst the tragic poets of travelling back to regions of forgotten fable and dark legendary mythus. Antiquity availed powerfully for their purposes, because of necessity it abstracted all petty details of individuality and local notoriety; all that would have composed a *character*. It acted as twilight acts, (which removes day's "mutable distinctions,") and reduced the historic person to that sublime state of monotonous gloom which suited the views of a poet who wanted only the *situation*, but would have repelled a poet who sought also for the complex features of a character. It is true that such remote and fabulous periods are visited at times, though not haunted, by the modern dramatist. Events are sought, even upon the French stage, from Gothic or from Moorish times.[22] But in that case, the poet endeavours to improve and strengthen any traits of character that tradition may have preserved, or by a direct effort of power to create them altogether, where history presents a blank neutrality;—whereas the Greek poet used simply that faint outline of character, in its gross distinctions of good and bad, which the situation itself implied. For example, the Creon of Thebes is pretty uniformly exhibited as tyrannical and cruel.[23] But that was the mere result of his position as a rival originally for the throne, and still more as the executive minister of the popular vengeance against Polynices for having brought a tide of war against his mother land: in that representative character, Creon is compelled to acts of cruelty against Antigone in her sublime exercise of natural piety—both sisterly and filial; and this cruelty to her and to the miserable wreck her father, making the very wrath of Heaven an argument for further persecution, terminates in leaving him an object of hatred to the spectator. But after all, his conduct seems to have been purely official and ministerial. Nor, if the reader think otherwise, will he find any further emanation from Creon's individual will or heart than the mere blank expression of tyranny in a public cause: nothing, in short, of that complexity and interweaving of qualities, that interaction of moral and intellectual powers, which we moderns understand

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by a character. In short, all the rude outlines of character on the Greek stage were, in the first place, mere inheritances from tradition, and generally mere determinations from the situation: and in no instance did the qualities of a man's will, heart, or constitutional temperament, manifest themselves by and through a collision or strife amongst each other; which is our test of a dramatic character. And therefore it was, that elder or even fabulous ages were used as the true natural field of the tragic poet; partly because antiquity ennobled; partly also because, by abstracting the individualities of a character, it left the historic figure in that neutral state which was most entirely passive to the moulding and determining power of the situation.

Two objections we foresee—1st, That even Æschylus, the sublimest of the Greek tragedians, did *not* always go back to a high antiquity. He himself had fought in the Persian war; and yet he brings both Xerxes and his father Darius (by means of his apparition) upon the stage; though the very Marathon of the father was but ten years earlier than the Thermopylæ and Salamis of the son. But in this instance the scene is not properly Grecian: it is referred by the mind to Susa, the capital of Persia, far eastward even of Babylon, and four months' march from Hellas. Remoteness of space in that case countervailed the proximity in point of time; though it may be doubted whether, without the benefit of the supernatural, it would, even in that case, have satisfied the Grecian taste. And it certainly would not, had the whole reference of the piece not been so intensely Athenian.[24] For, when we talk of Grecian tragedy, we must remember that, after all, the Pagan tragedy was in any proper sense exclusively Athenian; and the tendency of the Grecian taste, in its general Grecian character, was in various instances modified or absolutely controlled by that special feature of its existence.

2dly, It will be urged, as indicating this craving after antiquity to be no peculiar or distinguishing feature of the Greek stage, that we moderns also turn away sometimes with dislike from a modern subject. Thus, if it had no other fault, the Charles I. of Banks[25] is

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coldly received by English readers, doubtless; but not because it is too modern. The objection to it is, that a parliamentary war is too intensely political; and political, moreover, in a way which doubly defeated its otherwise tragic power; first, because questions too *notorious* and too domineering of law and civil polity were then at issue; the very same which came to a final hearing and settlement in 1688–9. Our very form of government at this day is the result of the struggle then going on—a fact which eclipses and dwarfs any separate or private interest of an individual prince, though otherwise and by his personal character in the highest degree an object of tragic pity and reverence.[a] Secondly, because the political interest afloat at that era (1649) was too complex and intricate; it wanted the simplicity of a poetic interest. That is the objection to Charles I. as a tragedy; not because modern, but because too domineeringly political; and because the political features of the case[b] were too many and too intricate.

VIII. Thus far, therefore, we now comprehend the purposes and true *locus* to the human imagination of the Grecian tragedy—that it was a most imposing scenic exhibition of a few grand situations; grand from their very simplicity, and from the consequences which awaited their *dénouement;* and seeking support to this grandeur from constantly fixing its eye upon elder ages lost in shades of antiquity; or, if departing from that ideal now and then, doing so with a view to patriotic objects, and seeking an occasional dispensation from the rigour of art in the popular indulgence to whatever touched the glory of Athens. Let the reader take, along with them,[c] two other circumstances, and he will then complete the idea of this stately drama: first, the character of the DIALOGUE;[d] secondly, the functions of the CHORUS.[e]

IX. From 150 to 180[f] lines of hexameter iambic verse

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a in the very highest degree, an object of tragic sympathy.
b the casuistic features of the situation
c along with him
d *Dialogue;*
e *Chorus.*
f one hundred and fifty to one hundred and eighty.

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compose the dialogue of each act.* This space is sufficient for the purpose of unfolding the situation to the spectator; but, as a means of unfolding a character, would have been by much too limited. For such a purpose, again, as this last, numerous scenes, dialogues, or soliloquies, must have been requisite; whereas generally, upon the Greek stage, a single scene, one dialogue between two interlocutors, occupies the entire act. The object of this dialogue was, of course, to bring forward the prominent points of the situation, and to improve the interest arising out of [a]—1. its grandeur; 2. its statuesque arrangement to the eye; or, 3. the burden of tragic consequences which it announced. With such purposes, so distinct from any which are pursued upon the modern stage, arose a corresponding distinction of the dialogue. Had the dialogue ministered to any purpose so *progressive* and so active as

*The five acts, which old tradition prescribed as binding upon the Greek tragic drama, cannot always be marked off by the interruptions of the chorus. In the *Heracleidæ* of Euripides they can. But it is evident that these acts existed for the sake of the chorus, by way of allowing sufficient openings (both as to number and length) for the choral dances; and the necessity must have grown out of the time allowed for a dramatic representation, and originally, therefore, out of the mere accidental convenience prescribed by the social usages of Athens. The rule, therefore, was at any rate an arbitrary rule. Purely conventional it would have been, and local, had it even grown out of any Attic superstition (as we have sometimes thought it might) as to the number of the choral dances. But most probably it rested upon a sort of convention, which of all is the least entitled to respect or translation to foreign soils, viz. the mere local arrangement of meals and sleeping hours in Athens; which, having prescribed a limited space to the whole performance, afterwards left this space to be distributed between the recitation and the more popular parts, addressed to the eye and ear[b] as the mob of Athens should insist.[26] Horace, in saying roundly, as a sort of *brutum fulmen*, "*Non quinto brevior, non sit productior, actu fabulæ*,"[c] [27] delivers this capricious rule in the capricious manner which becomes it. The *stet pro ratione voluntas* comes forward equally in the substance of the precept and the style[d] of its delivery.

a its interest as regarded—
b to eye and ear
c "*Neu quinto brevior neu sit productior, actu Fabula.*"
d in the style

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that of developing a character, with new incidents and changes of the speakers coming forward at every moment, as occasions for evoking the peculiarities of that character—in such a case the more it had resembled the movement, the fluctuations, the hurry of actual life and of real colloquial intercourse, the more it would have aided the views of the poet. But the purpose of the Greek dialogue was not progressive; essentially it was retrospective. For example, the *Heracleidæ* opens with a fine and impressive group[a] as ever sculptor chiselled—a group of young children, princely daughters of a great hero, whose acts resound through all mythology; viz. of Hercules, of a Grecian cleanser and deliverer from monsters, once irresistible to quell the oppressor, but now dead, and himself the subject of outrage in the persons of his children. These youthful ladies, helpless from their sex, with their grandmother Alcmene, now aged and infirm, have arranged themselves as a marble group on the steps ascending to the altars of a local deity. They have but one guide, one champion—a brother in arms of the deceased Hercules, and his reverential friend; but this brave man also suffering, through years and martial toils, under the penalties of decaying strength. Such is the situation, such the inauguration of this solemn tragedy. The dialogue which follows between Iolaus, the faithful guardian of the ladies, and the local ruler of the land, takes up this inaugural picture—so pompous from blazing altars and cloudy incense—so ceremonial from the known religious meaning of the attitudes [b]—so beautiful from the loveliness of the youthful suppliants, rising tier above tier according to their ages, and the graduation of the altar steps—so moving in its picture of human calamity by the contrasting figure of the two grey-haired supporters—so complete and orbicular in its delineation of human frailty by the surmounting circumstances of its crest, the altar, the priestess, the temple, the serene Grecian sky—this impressive picture, having of itself appealed to every

a as fine and impressive a group
b so religious from the known meaning of the conventional attitudes—

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one of thirty thousand hearts, having already challenged universal attention, is now explained and unfolded through the entire first act. Iolaus, the noble old warrior, who had clung the closer to the fluttering dovecot of his buried friend from the unmerited persecution which had assaulted them, comments to the stranger prince upon the spectacle before him—a spectacle significant to Grecian eyes, intelligible at once to every body; but still rare, and witnessed in practice by nobody. The prince, Demophoon, is a ruler of Athens: the scene is placed in the Attic territory, but not in Athens; about fifteen miles, in fact, from that city, and not far from the dread field of Marathon.[a] To the prince, Iolaus explains the lost condition of his young flock. The ruler of Argos had driven them out of every asylum in the Peloponnesus. From city to city he had followed them at the heels, with his cruel heralds of persecution. They were a party of unhappy fugitives,(most of them proclaiming their innocence by their very age and helplessness,) that had run the circle of Greek hospitality: every where had been hunted out like wild beasts, or those[b] common nuisances from which their illustrious father had liberated the earth: that the long circuit of their unhappy wanderings had brought them at last to Athens, in which they had[c] a final confidence, as knowing well not only[d] the justice of that state, but that she only would not be moved from her purposes by fear of the aggressor. No finer opening can be imagined. The statuesque beauty of the group, and the unparalleled persecution which the first act exposes, (a sort of misery and an absolute hostility of the human race to which our experience suggests no corresponding case, except that of a leper in the middle ages, or the case of a man under a papal interdict,[e]) fix the attention of the spectators beyond any other situation in Grecian tragedy. And the compliment to Athens, not verbal but involved in the very situation, gave a depth of in-

a of future Marathon.
b or, like those
c in which city they had
d as knowing not only
e middle ages, or of a Pariah, or of a man under a papal interdict

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terest to this drama, for the very tutelary region of the drama; which ought to stamp it with a sort of prerogative as in some respects the ideal tragedy or model of the Greek theatre.

Now, this one dialogue, as filling one act of a particular drama, is quite sufficient to explain the view we take of the Greek tragic dialogue. *It is altogether retrospective.*[28] It takes for its theme the visible group arranged on the stage before the spectators from the first. Looking back to this, the two interlocutors (supposed to come forward upon the stage[29]) contrive between them, one by pertinent questions, the other by judicious management of his replies, to bring out those circumstances in the past fortunes and immediate circumstances of this interesting family, which may put the audience in possession of all which it is important for them to know. The reader sees the dark legendary character which invests the whole tale; and in the following acts this darkness is made more emphatic from the fact that incidents are used, of which contradictory versions existed, some poets adopting one version, some another: so cloudy and uncertain were the facts. All this apocryphal gloom aids that sanctity and awe which belong to another and a higher mode of life; to that slumbering life of sculpture, as opposed to painting, which we have called a life within a life.[30] Grecian taste would inevitably require that the dialogue should be adjusted to this starting-point and standard. Accordingly, in the first place, the dialogue is always (and in a degree quite unperceived [a] by the translators up to this time) severe, massy, simple, yet solemnized intentionally by the use of a select vocabulary, corresponding (in point of archaism and remoteness from ordinary use) to our scriptural [b] vocabulary! Secondly, the metre is of a kind never yet [c] examined with suitable care. There were two objects aimed at in the Greek iambic of the tragic drama; and in some measure these objects were in collision with each other, unless most artfully managed. One

a degree perhaps unperceived
b to our own scriptural
c kind not yet

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was, to exhibit a purified imitation of real human conversation. The other was, to impress upon this colloquial form, thus far by its very nature recalling ordinary human life, a character of solemnity and religious conversation.[a] Partly this was effected by arts of omission[b] and commission; by banishing certain words or forms of words; by recalling others of high antiquity: particular tenses, for instance, were never used by the tragic poets; not even by Euripides, *(the most Wordsworthian*[c] *of the Athenian poets in the circumstance of having a peculiar theory of poetic diction, which lowered its tone of separation, and took it down from the cothurnus:* [d]) other verbal forms, again, were used nowhere but upon the stage. Partly, therefore, this consecration of the tragic style was effected by the antique cast, and the exclusive cast of its phraseology. But, partly also, it was effected by the metre. From whatever cause it may arise—chiefly, perhaps, from differences in the genius of the two languages—certain it is that the Latin iambics of Seneca, &c., (in the tragedies ascribed to him,[31]) cannot be so read by an Eng-

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a religious consecration.

b acts of omission

c In the second edition the following note is inserted:

*Valckenaer, in his immortal series of comments on the *Phœnissæ* of Euripides, notices the peculiar spirit and tendency of the innovations introduced into the tragic diction by this youngest of the great Athenian dramatists. These innovations ran in the very same direction as those of Wordsworth in our own times; to say this, however, without further explanation, considering how profoundly the views of Wordsworth in this matter have been misunderstood, would simply be—to mislead the English reader equally as to Euripides. Yet, as we should be sorry to discuss so great a theme indirectly and in a corner, it may be enough for the present to remark—that Euripides did not mean to tax his great predecessors Æschylus and Sophocles with any error of taste in the cast of their diction. Having *their* purposes, they chose wisely. But he felt that the Athenian tragedy had two functions—1. to impress awe, and religious terror; 2. to impress pity. This last he adopted as his own peculiar function; and with it a corresponding diction—less grand (it is true) and stately, but counterbalancing this loss by a far greater power of pure (sometimes we may say, of holy) household pathos. Such also was the change wrought by Wordsworth.

d Not in italics in the second edition.

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lish mouth as to produce anything like the sonorous rhythmus, and the grand intonation of the Greek iambics. This is a curious fact, and as yet, we believe, unnoticed. But, over and above this original adaptation of the Greek language to the iambic metre, we have no doubt whatever that the recitation of verse on the stage[a] was of an artificial and semi-musical character. It was undoubtedly much more *sustained* and intonated with a slow and measured stateliness,* which, whilst harmonizing it with the other circumstances of solemnity in Greek tragedy, would bring it nearer to music. Beyond a doubt, it had the effect (and might have the effect even now, managed by a good reader) of the *recitative* in the Italian opera: as, indeed, in other points, the Italian opera is a much nearer representative of the Greek tragedy, than the direct modern tragedy—professing that title.[32]

X. As to the Chorus, nothing needs to be said[b] upon this element of the Athenian tragedy. Every body knows how solemn, and therefore how solemnizing, must have been the richest and most lyrical music, the most passionate of the ancient poetry, the most dithyrambic of tragic and religious raptures, supported to the eye by the most hieroglyphic and therefore mysterious of dances. For the dances of the chorus—the strophe and the antistrophe—were symbolic, and therefore full of mysterious meanings; and not the less impressive, because these meanings and these symbols had lost their significancy to the mob; since the very cause of that loss lay in the antiquity of their origin. One

* Any man, who has at all studied the Greek iambics, must well remember those forms of the metre which are used in a cadence, at the close of a resounding passage, meant to express a full pause, and the prodigious difference from such as were meant for weaker lines, or less impressive metrical effects. These cadences, with their full body of rhythmus, are never reproduced in the Latin imitations of the iambic hexameter: nor does it seem within the compass of Latin metre[c] to reach such effects: though otherwise, and especially by the dactylic hexameter, the Latin language[d] is more powerful than the Greek.

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a on the Attic stage
b little needs to be said
c Latin iambic metre
d in the Dactylic hexameter the Latin Language

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great error which remains to be removed, is the notion that the chorus either did support, or was meant to support the office of a moral teacher. The chorus simply stood on the level of a sympathizing spectator, detached from the business and interests of the action; [a] and its office was to guide or to interpret the sympathies of the audience.[33] Here was a great error of Milton's:[34] but it is not an error of this place or subject.[b] At present, it is sufficient to say, that the mysterious solemnity conferred by the chorus, presupposes, and is in perfect harmony with, our theory of a life within a life—a life sequestrated into some far off slumbering state, having the severe tranquillity of Hades—a life symbolized by the marble life of sculpture; but utterly out of all symmetry and proportion to the realities of that human life which we moderns take up as the basis of our tragic drama.

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a the business and the crash of the catastrophe

b Here, perhaps, was a great error of Milton's: which will be found in two* separate places.

*Viz. in the brief Introduction to the *Samson Agonistes*, and in a remarkable passage (taxed not unreasonably with bigotry by Wordsworth) of the *Paradise Regained*.

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NOTES.

1 On the growth of individualism in Athenian comedy see Posnett, Comparative Literature, 212 218, 246-252.

2 On the philosophy of the comic and the character and function of comedy see Hegel, Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik II., 226-228; III. 533-537; Kedney, Hegel's Æsthetics, 292-295; Carriere, Die Poesie, 511-524; Gottschall, Poetik, Die Dichtkunst und ihre Technik, II., 244-261; Wackernagel, Poetik, Rhetorik und Stilistik, 268, 285-294; Everett, Poetry, Comedy, and Duty, 155-216; Fitzgerald, Principles of Comedy and Dramatic Effect, 58-149.

3 This certainly needs qualification. Mr. Frederic Harrison states the truth in a more discriminating manner: "The strength of the century lay neither in politics nor in art; it lay in breadth of understanding. In political genius, in poetry, in art, the eighteenth was inferior to the seventeenth century, and even to the sixteenth; in moral, in social, and in material development it was far inferior to the nineteenth. But in philosophy, in science, in mental versatility, it has hardly any equal in the ages. * * It organised into sciences (crystallising the data till then held in solution) physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, comparative anatomy, electricity, psychology, and the elements of social science, both in history and in statics. * * For mass, result, multiplicity, and organic power, it may be doubted if any century in modern history has more to show than the eighteenth."—A Few Words about the Eighteenth Century. The Nineteenth Century. March, 1883.

4 Cf. Posnett, Relativity of Literature, Comparative Literature, 21-56; Taine, History of English Literature, Introduction.

5 "Natio comœda est." Juvenal thus speaks of the Greeks in his Third Satire, verse 100.

6 The date of this paper, over half a century ago, should be kept in mind. That, so far as England was concerned, the statement was justified by the facts is indicated by Donaldson's statement in the preface to his translation of K. O. Müller's History of the Literature of Ancient Greece, which appeared the month before De Quincey's essay,—"before the publication of the present work no history of Greek literature had been

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published in the English language." In Germany, however, a number of scholars certainly had 'attempted to solve the problem.'

7 On the evolution of Greek tragedy from the choral dance see Müller, A History of the Literature of Ancient Greece, I, 253-271, 380-391; Donaldson, The Theatre of the Greeks, 27-48, 54-73; Mahaffy, A History of Classical Greek Literature, I: 2, 1-12; Posnett, Comparative Literature, 99-129, 201-206; Moulton, The Ancient Classical Drama, 3-22; Campbell, A Guide to Greek Tragedy, 41-59.

8 It must not from this be inferred that the entire expense of the performance was paid by the state, that there was no admission fee. On the contrary, though priests, generals, the orphans of those slain in battle, and distinguished citizens to whom the honor had been especially granted had places reserved for them, the mass of the populace paid a fixed admission fee that probably entitled them to any seats not reserved for the classes named. Citizens too poor to pay the small admission fee could, however, receive the amount from a special fund set aside for the purpose, as in some of our states children too poor to buy them are provided with free text-books, while those that can afford to do so are expected to purchase their own.

9 Haigh says (The Attic Theatre, 122), "Modern investigations, based on the existing remains, lead to the conclusion that the number was 27,500." Prof. Mahaffy, however, writes (A History of Classical Greek Literature, I: 2, 15) "The current statement that the Athenian theatre held nearly 30,000 is based on the misprision of a remark in Plato's *Symposium*, and has long since been rejected by me after a careful measurement. Dr. Dörpfeld's plan will show 15,000 to be the maximum." Though the most important, the theatre at Athens was not the largest in Greece, that of Megalopolis, for instance, accomodating 44,000. In Asia Minor the theatres were even larger: that at Ephesus, memorable for its connection with the Apostle Paul (Acts XIX.), accomodated no less than 56,700.

10 The Drury Lane Theatre in question was erected in 1791-4, and was at the time considered the finest in Europe. It was burned on Feb. 24, 1809. The anecdote that Sheridan, one of the proprietors, calmly watched the fire from the Piazza Coffee House, saying that 'a man may surely be allowed to take a glass of wine by his own fireside,' is well-known; but is probably unauthentic.

11 Whether during the flourishing period of Attic tragedy a stage really existed in the theatres of Greece is a mooted question among scholars. Dr. Höpken (De Theatro Attico sæculi ante Christum quinti, cf. American Journal of Philology, 5: 252-255) on arguments drawn from the study of the extant Greek tragedies, Pollux, and Vitruvius; and Dr. Dörpfeld and Dr. Kawerau, from careful examination of the ruins of the Dionysiac Theatre (Baumeister, Denkmäler des klassichen Altertums, s. v. Theater-gebäude) decide that it did not; that

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the actors were on a level with the orchestra. The whole question is concisely treated in Haigh, The Attic Theatre, 142-146.

12 It is no longer generally believed that such mechanism existed in the mask, nor do the *a priori* reasons on which its existence was conjectured seem to be valid. Professor Mahaffy writes, "In the great theatre of Syracuse, I myself tested its acoustic properties, and found that a friend talking in his ordinary tone could be heard perfectly at the farthest seat—this, too, with the back of the stage open; whereas it was in the old performances closed by lofty scenes, and an upper story from which gods were shown."—A History of Classical Greek Literature, I: 2, 15.

13 This is a half-truth stated so strongly that it conveys an idea essentially false. Though the time that elapsed between the first production of Thespis, at Athens (B. C. 535) and the death of Euripides (B. C. 406) was too brief for Greek tragedy to free itself from the trammels of its religious origin, there is discernible in the extant plays a very decided development both in form and in scope. Sophocles used motives and methods entirely foreign to Æschylus; and Euripides, with "his touches of things common," introduced disintegrating elements that in Agathon apparently (for the exact nature of The Flower is not known) entirely separated tragedy from the old myths. Cf. Moulton, The Ancient Classical Drama, a Study in Literary Evolution; Perry, A History of Greek Literature; Symonds, Studies of the Greek Poets, II, 33-36; Symonds, Essays Speculative and Suggestive, I, 60-65.

14 The average length of a tragedy by Æschylus is decidedly less than the average length of one by either Sophocles or Euripides. The average of Æschylus is 1159 lines; of Sophocles 1467 lines; of Euripides (the Rhesus, Alcestis, and Cyclops not taken into consideration) 1448 lines. DeQuincey has diminished rather than exaggerated the importance of the chorus: of some of the dramas of Æschylus over one-third is given up to "the business of the chorus."

15 Nec pueros coram populo Medea trucidet. Horace, Ars Poetica, v. 185. It is noteworthy that, notwithstanding this admonition, Seneca did make his Medea kill her children before the spectators.

16 De Quincey elsewhere states this more tersely: In the ancient drama, to represent it justly, the unlearned reader must imagine grand situations, impressive groups; in the modern, tumultuous movement, a grand stream of action. In the Greek drama, he must conceive the presiding power to be *Death;* in the English, *Life.* What Death?—What Life? That sort of death, or of life locked up and frozen into everlasting slumber, which we see in sculpture; that sort of life, of tumult, of agitation, of tendency to something beyond, which we see in painting. The picturesque, in short, domineers over

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English tragedy; the sculpturesque, or the statuesque, over the Grecian.—A Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature in its Foremost Pretensions. Cf. note 30.

17 This is evidently a criticism on Addison, who says (Spectator No. 44): "Murders and executions are always transacted behind the scenes in the French theatre; which in general is very agreeable to the manners of a polite and civilized people." Orestes in Sophocles' Electra resolves to kill his mother: "but because such a spectacle would have been too shocking to the audience, this dreadful resolution is executed behind the scenes." Cf. the manner in which De Quincey, in his article on The Antigone of Sophocles as Represented on the Edinburgh Stage, makes sport of Addison because of the views on the Italian opera that he unwarrantably attributes to him.

18 The essential truth of this is not vitiated by the fact that in a few instances, e. g. Ajax and Alcestis, death actually occurs on the Greek stage, for in these cases there is no violent action. That the actors are not invariably in a reposing state, however, may be seen in the Libation-Pourers, where Orestes drags his mother from the stage; the corresponding scene in Sophocles' Electra, where Antigone is hardly in a state of repose; and Euripides' Helen and The Suppliants. The exceptions are, however, so few in number as to prove the rule.

19 The death-cries of Agamemnon, Ægisthus, and Clytemnestra are all heard at the conclusion of odes by the chorus. During the singing of a choral ode in The Suppliants sufficient time elapses for Pelasgus and Danaus to go into Argos, for an assembly of the citizens to be convoked, for a speech in favor of the daughters of Danaus to be delivered, for protection to be granted them, and for Danaus to return with the news. The time of the first episode of the Agamemnon is the morning following the fall of Troy; after the second stasimon a herald from the Argive host enters with the news that Troy has been razed to the ground, that the Grecian fleet had been separated by a severe storm, and that his master Agamemnon has landed and is now near at hand. Sophocles makes the same arbitrary use of time; during the parode of the chorus Antigone carries out her purpose of performing the funeral rites over the body of Polynices; during an ode Lichas carries the robe from Dejanira to Hercules, and Hyllus returns with the news of the direful effect of the fatal gift; and even in the Œdipus the King, with which it is said 'no work of tragic art can be compared for the closeness and consistency of the plot,' during the two odes and a brief episode sufficient time is supposed to elapse for the Messenger to find the Shepherd, who had removed "as far as possible" from Thebes, and bring him to the city. Similar instances of the assumed lapse of considerable time during the singing of a choral ode may be found in Euripides' Phœnician Maidens, Suppliants, Heracleidæ, Helen, Andromache, Orestes, Iphigenia in Aulis, and Iphigenia in Tauris.

20 Cf. A. W. Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Litera-

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ture, Lect. V.—F. Schlegel, Lectures on the History of Literature, Lect. I.

[21] Elsewhere, however, (The Antigone of Sophocles, etc.) De Quincey, contrasting the catastrophes of Greek and English tragedies, writes, "In the Greek we see a breathless waiting for a doom that cannot be evaded,—a waiting, as it were, for the last shock of an earthquake, or the inexorable rising of a deluge," a statement fully as strong as anything in Schlegel. Cf. Symonds, Studies of the Greek Poets, I, 385-388, 461-464.

[22] Cf. Corneille's Le Cid.

[23] That is, of course, in the plays that show him opposed to Œdipus or Antigone; the Creon of the Œdipus the King is an entirely different character from the Creon of the Œdipus at Colonus.

[24] The same cannot, however, be said of Phrynichus' The Capture of Miletus, produced but a few years after the event represented, and with the scene laid in the not far distant Athenian colony in Ionia. To be sure, the Athenians fined Phrynichus 1000 drachmas for producing the play, but this is said to have been because he reminded them so forcibly of the defeat of an ally. It is noteworthy, however, that when in 476 he celebrated the Greek victory over the Persians he laid the scene of the Phœnician Women in distant Persia. This play was entirely successful.

[25] Professor Masson's note on this is "The reference seems to be to one or other of the tragedies of John Banks, a London dramatic author of the latter part of the seventeenth century, the earliest dated 1677 and the latest 1696." This seems a fair deduction from the text; but the vague nature of the reference, "one or other of the tragedies," and the fact that De Quincey expressly gives 1649 as the date of the tragedy that he has in mind should not escape attention. As a matter of fact, though he dramatized the fates of Essex (cf. The Tatler, No. 14) Anne Boleyn, Lady Jane Grey, and Mary, Queen of Scots, there is no record of Banks' having treated the death of Charles. De Quincey probably confused John Banks, the dramatist, and John Banks, the author of a short Critical Review of the Life of Oliver Cromwell (1739). If so, he erred in good company, for Carlyle makes the same mistake (Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches, I. Ch. 2.).

The Famous Tragedie of Charles the First Basely Butchered, published anonymously in 1649, is undoubtedly the play to which De Quincey refers. The Companion to the Play-house (1764) says of it, "This Play seems to have been written by some very strong Party Man, who thought at so critical a Juncture the Declaration of his Name would have been attended with Hazard, perhaps even of Life; yet was hardy enough to declare his Principles under the Protection and Secrecy of the Press, at a Time, and in a Manner, wherein he must, if known,

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have render'd himself liable to the most rigid ministerial Resentment."

As De Quincey evidently relied on his memory in citing the play, and as it has passed so completely into oblivion that it cannot be said to be received even coldly by English readers, I cannot but think that what he really had in mind was a vague remembrance of the criticisms called forth by Home's Agis. In it the critics saw a figurative representation of the fate of Charles I., and condemned the play so strongly that it failed, notwithstanding its production by a cast including Garrick, Mossop, Mrs Cibber, Mrs. Yates, and Mrs. Pritchard. Cf. The Companion to the Play-house, I, s. v. Agis; Doran, Annals of the English Stage, II, 33.

[26] It is far from clear how any prescription as to the *length* of the drama could have had much influence on the *number* of its divisions. In all probability four plays were produced consecutively, the whole day being given up to their performance. The antepirrema of the parabasis of Aristophanes' Birds would seem to show that the local arrangement as to meal hours had no controlling influence in determining the order or length of events at the Greater Dionysia:—

> "Nothing can be more delightful than the having wings to wear!
> A spectator sitting here accomodated with a pair,
> Might for instance (if he found a tragic chorus dull and heavy)
> Take his flight and dine at home; and if he did not choose to leave ye,
> Might return in better humour, when the weary drawl was ended." —Frere's translation.

Cf. Haigh, The Attic Theatre, 33-36; Freytag, Die Technik des Dramas, 100-120.

[27] Neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu
Fabula. —Ars Poetica, 189-190.

[28] This again is generally rather than invariably true. In the Libation-Pourers, the Ajax, and the Œdipus at Colonus, for instance, parts of the dialogue are prospective.

[29] Cf. note 11. Modern excavations have shown that the stage of the Greek theatre was so shallow, that the two interlocutors could not have come very far forward from the elaborate group that De Quincey pictures. The stage at Epidaurus was but eight feet deep, that at the Peiraeus but ten feet, and this latter seems to have been about the average depth of the early Greek stage. Cf. Haigh, The Attic Theatre, 142.

[30] In his paper, The Antigone of Sophocles, etc., De Quincey says: "To my own feeling the different principle of passion which governs the Grecian conception of tragedy, as compared with the English, is best conveyed by saying that the Grecian

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is a breathing from the world of painting. What we read in sculpture is not absolutely death, but still less is it the fulness of life. We read there the abstraction of a life that reposes, the sublimity of a life that aspires, the solemnity of a life that is thrown to infinite distance. The last is the feature of sculpture which seems most characteristic; the form which presides in the most commanding groupes "is not dead but sleepeth"; true, but it is the sleep of a life sequestrated, solemn, liberated from the bonds of space and time, and (as to both alike) thrown (I repeat the word) to a distance which is infinite. It affects us profoundly, but not by agitation. Now, on the other hand, the breathing life—life kindling, trembling, palpitating—that life which speaks to us in painting, this is also the life that speaks to us in English tragedy."

At least the germ of this comparison is to be found in Schlegel (Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, Lect. IV.): "We moderns prefer on the stage, as elsewhere, groups of a picturesque description * * * ; but the ancients * * generally avoided it. * * * The poetical conception required a certain degree of repose in the action, and the keeping together certain masses, so as to exhibit a succession of *statuesque* situations, and it is not improbable that the player remained for some time motionless in one attitude." Cf. also the elaborate comparison of Greek tragedy to sculpture at the end of Lecture V.

31 "There can be no reasonable doubt that they are the work of the philosopher, nor is the testimony of antiquity really ambiguous on the point."—Cruttwell, A History of Roman Literature, 374.

32 "The first elementary idea of a Greek tragedy is to be sought in a serious Italian opera. The Greek dialogue is represented by the recitative; and the tumultuous lyrical parts assigned chiefly, though not exclusively, to the chorus on the Greek stage, are represented by the impassioned airs, duos, trios, choruses, etc., on the Italian.

—De Quincey, the Antigone of Sophocles, etc.

This seems to be "in polar antithesis" to the view of Schlegel: "The ancient tragedy, because it was accompanied with music and dancing, has also been frequently compared with the opera. But this comparison betrays an utter ignorance of the spirit of classical antiquity. * * It is absurd to think of comparing them together. —A. W. Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, Lect. IV.

A *tertium quid* can easily be formed.

33 While this is in general true as to the function of the chorus, it must not be thought that the chorus is invariably "detached from the business and interests of the action." In the play that De Quincey cites, the Heracleidæ of Euripides, the chorus is closely concerned with the outcome of the play, and the same is true of The Suppliants and The Eumenides of Æschylus, and The Women of Troy of Euripides. In the

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Libation-Pourers, the Œdipus at Colonus, the Philoctetes, and the Helen the chorus interferes in the action of the drama; and in the Iphigenia in Tauris they are soundly rated by Thoas for not interfering! Cf. Moulton, The Ancient Classical Drama, 65-69, 85-86; Kedney, Hegel's Æsthetics, 295-6.

34 After stating that he had introduced the chorus in Samson Agonistes "after the Greek manner" Milton added, "The measure of verse used in the Chorus is of all sorts, called by the Greeks Monostrophick, or rather Apolelymenon, without regard had to Strophe, Antistrophe, or Epode, which were a kind of stanzas framed only for the musick, then used with the Chorus that sung, not essential to the poem, and therefore not material."

The passage in Paradise Regained is pointed out by Professor Masson as IV., 338-352, where the error is rather as to the origin than as to the function of the chorus:

> "Our Hebrew songs and harps, in Babylon
> That pleas'd so well our victors' ears, declare
> That rather Greece from us these arts derived;
> Ill imitated, while they loudest sing
> The vices of their Deities, and their own,
> In fable, hymn, or song, so personating
> Their Gods ridiculous, and themselves past shame."

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